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GREEN BUILDINGS SUMMIT 2009

By Josh Costell, Tozour Energy Services **Getting Started on an Energy Reduction Plan**

With the country's current focus on environmentally friendly products and green living, many building owners are taking a look at how they can reduce their impact on the environment. Creating an energy reduction plan is a smart way to help the environment while also saving money.

In addition to substantial savings on utility bills, tax deductions, energy credits and rebates are available for energy efficient commercial buildings.

To get started on an energy reduction plan, first determine what your building's major energy challenges are, such as increasingly large utility bills or system inefficiencies. Next, benchmark your building to see how your energy consumption compares to similar buildings. An excellent tool to compare energy usage is the EPA's Portfolio Manager.

Evaluate whether your building's usage indicates opportunities to save energy. If yes, conduct an energy audit. This analysis evaluates the building's energy consumption and pinpoints major energy-saving opportunities. Before the audit, inventory the building's current state: number of occupants, type of HVAC systems and major energy consumers, average utility bills and amount of energy typically used.



Josh Costell

It's also important to determine peak hours of energy usage for the building. Examine what time occupants typically leave. Drive by your building at night and see if there are lights still on. Also, document when you start and stop building systems. These things should be addressed with the auditor.

The auditor will interview you about the building's challenges, review past utility bills and discuss your overall goals. Next is a room-by-room analysis to check for areas of energy loss, analyze performance of the building's HVAC, lighting, and electrical systems and measure temperature trends to determine hot or cold spots.

A report will show suggested changes that will save both energy and money. Some initiatives, such as switching the type of light bulbs used

or shutting down building systems when not necessary, will require little or no investment.

Other changes may include installing new HVAC systems, energy efficient lighting and building control systems. The money saved on energy bills usually pays for the new equipment within a few years, and other benefits such as increased efficiency mean improved comfort for occupants.

However, making technological changes is not enough. Educate building employees on how they can make an impact. For example, present the difference in dollars that changing the temperature by even a few degrees has on energy bills. Being in the building day-to-day, employees may also have insight and ideas that an outsider would not. When occupants are motivated to participate, you'll have an easier time keeping your plan on track.

Staying committed to an energy reduction plan will prove rewarding in many ways. If every building owner in the United States made reduced energy consumption a priority, we could see a dramatic impact on our planet – and on our wallets.

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